



Caption: Representatives of the NOLR campaign group (from left to right: Moira, Stuart, Gordon, Rachel)

On Thursday 19th March 2026 four brave individuals (pictured above) attended a roundtable discussion on Orders of Lifelong Restriction at the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh. The event was hosted by the Criminal Justice Committee which was chaired by Rosemary Agnew who is a Scottish Human Rights Commissioner.

Prior to entering the parliament building all four understood the enormity of the testimony they were about to give - not only on behalf of the NOLR campaign group but on behalf of over 300 individuals and their families who have suffered as a result of this cruel sentence which has no end.

Background to discussion

The roundtable discussion came about in response to a **paper** (add link to <https://www.scottishhumanrights.com/media/3092/discussionpaper-policy-olr-05092025.pdf>) published on 10 Sept 2025 by the Scottish Human Rights Commission which analysed the Order of Lifelong Restriction (OLR) sentence from a human rights perspective. The paper highlighted serious concerns.

Representatives from the NOLR group were invited to attend the roundtable discussion for the purpose of sharing how the indeterminate OLR sentence has been operating in practice.

Examples of human rights abuses

The participants from NOLR gave plenty of examples of human right abuses - the main one being that for the vast majority who receive this order, there is no route to exiting prison.

Rachel and Gordon gave harrowing testimony of the ill treatment and injustice experienced by their respective sons which must have shocked everyone present. Rachel's son entered prison on a 5.5 years minimum punishment tariff. For 16 years he has been held in prison in closed conditions and following a serious back injury is now chronically disabled and bedridden.

Focus was also made of unfair, discriminatory aspects of the court sentencing process in relation to Order of Lifelong Restrictions. For example:

- unfounded allegations are included in the Risk Assessment Report. This exaggerates risk.
- the process is discriminatory (judges do not order everyone during the court sentencing process to be risk assessed).
- extreme carelessness on the part of risk assessors has been identified. Assessors have been known to copy and paste from one report to the next and then forget to delete another man's convictions.
- there is no independent scrutiny of Risk Assessment Reports submitted to the court but these are crucial documents which can effectively condemn a man to lifelong incarceration **prior** to beginning a custodial sentence.

The founder of the NOLR group, Shirley Hutton, was, unfortunately unable to attend the discussion in person due to ill health. She was, however, able to watch proceedings live via video link. Gordon read out some statements provided by Shirley in response to questions on behalf of the group.

David Cross, who has vast experience within Criminal Justice social work and has carried out research in HMP Glenochil, gave powerful testimony as to hopelessness and despair experienced by OLR prisoners who have lost all trust in the system.

Sarah Snell, Chief Inspector of Prisons in Scotland pointed out there exist countries which don't have any indeterminate sentences, including Portugal which abolished indeterminate sentencing in 1884.

The NOLR group was satisfied that the roundtable discussion had covered aspects of the OLR sentence which they considered to be human rights breaches.

The four representatives who had travelled long distances to attend the Scottish Parliament at their own expense, left the event feeling hopeful that at last someone is listening; that at last there is an impetus to right this dreadful wrong.

What next?

A report will be published by the Scottish Human Rights Commission as a result of this roundtable discussion. Included in the report will be recommendation for the Criminal Justice Committee to implement to ensure human rights are upheld.

If you would like to find out more about the NOLR campaign group in Scotland goto <https://nolr.org>.